

## HASHISH IN ISLAM 9TH TO 18TH CENTURY

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CANNABIS was used as an intoxicant (*phang*) in India and Iran as far back as 1000 B.C.<sup>1,2</sup> It was adopted in the Moslem Middle East 1,800 years later, two centuries after the death of the prophet Mohammed. Indeed, during his life time (A.D. 570-632), the use of cannabis preparations (known in the Middle East as hashish, which means "grass" in Arabic) was unknown. This might be the reason why the prophet did not explicitly forbid in the holy Koran intoxication by cannabis, although he proscribed that induced by fermented beverages (alcohol, wine, beer).

There is no evidence that the Arabs became familiar with the intoxicating properties of hashish before the ninth century. At that time, they had already conquered Iraq and Syria and swept eastward to the border of Persia and Central Asia and westward through Asia Minor, North Africa, and Spain. (It was in 752 that the relentless Muslim expansion was halted at Poitiers by the Frankish king Charles Martel.)

In the ninth century, well after the establishment in A.D. 750 of the splendid Abasside caliphate in Bagdad, noted for its universities, Arab scholars translated the Greek texts of Dioscorides and Galen, and became familiar with the medicinal properties of cannabis. One physician of the early 10th century, Ibn Wahshiyah, warned of possible complications resulting from use of hashish. In his book, *On Poisons*, he claimed that the plant extract might cause death when mixed with other drugs. Another physician, the Persian born al-Rhazes, counselled against over-prescribing cannabis.<sup>3</sup> Traders travelling to Persia from India and Central Asia also may have spread knowledge of the plant's medicinal properties.

According to Rosenthal,<sup>4</sup> it was not until late in the ninth century that

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the use of hashish as an intoxicant surfaced in Islam. Called hashish instead of *bhang*, the Hindu designation, it was first consumed by members of religious Persian and Iraqi sects located at the eastern periphery of the Islamic empire which bordered the central steppes where the plant had its origins. And there was little cultural opposition at first because the holy Koran, which formulates in detail all of the rules of daily Muslim living, does not forbid explicitly the consumption of cannabis, although it proscribes the use of fermented beverages. And around A.D. 1000 the Fatima King al-Hakim issued an edict prohibiting the sale of alcohol throughout Syria and Egypt,<sup>3</sup> but did not ban cannabis.

In the 11th century a Turkish people, the Seljuk, captured Bagdad and assumed effective power, although they retained the Abassides as figure-heads. The use of hashish became popular in Islamic society and was frequently mentioned in its literature at the zenith of the power of the Seljuks, when they had made additional conquests and converts in the Middle East and at the same time fended off an invasion by the Crusaders.

The story of Hasan-I-Saban is familiar to many. He was an Ismaili fanatic leader who in 1090 founded in Persia the order of the Hashishiyans, often referred to in the West as "Assassins" because they murdered their political opponents. Marco Polo, the Venetian explorer, related how Hasan, "the old man of the mountain," snared young men and fed them a secret potion in the splendid gardens of his fortress, the Alamut. In this earthly paradise their main activity was to make love to sensuous women. This way Hasan kept his young followers under his spell and was able to send them on dangerous missions to assassinate his opponents. He promised the young men, "Upon your return, my angels shall bear you into paradise."

The question as to the nature of the potion given by Hasan was answered in 1818 by Silvester de Sacy,<sup>5</sup> who believed that it was hashish and also that the name Assassins derived from the name of Hasan's followers: Hashishiyans. Many accept this interpretation, which has been used ever since to link the use of hashish with violent behavior. Although often quoted, it is not supported by historical evidence.

There is no doubt that the "old man on the mountain," Hasan, was the shrewd Ismaili leader of a group of religious fanatics who defended an impregnable mountain fortress on the Persian border. That he indoctrinated some of his loyal followers, the *fidai*, blindly to carry out his orders is also true. And those orders sometimes included assassinating Hasan's

enemies. Several Arab sultans as well as leaders of the Crusades were murdered by these terrorists of the 12th century. Among them was Conrad Marquis de Montferrat, assassinated by one of Hasan's followers who had penetrated the Crusaders' camp disguised as a monk. So feared was the old man that even Saladin, one of the most famous Muslim generals of his time, had to abandon his plan to storm the Alamut.

The only evidence that Hasan actually gave hashish to his followers, however, is Marco Polo's anecdotal report which vaguely mentions a potion but no drug by name. If the old man did dispense hashish, he must have used its euphoriant quality sparingly, just enough to give his devotees a preview of the joys of the paradise Mohammed had promised to the faithful who died in battle.

There is another explanation why the followers of Hasan were called Hashishiyah, a term which would seem to designate users of hashish, numerous at the time. According to Lewis,<sup>6</sup> "the followers of Hasan were nicknamed '*Hashishiyah*' as an expression of contempt for their wild beliefs and extravagant behavior . . . . It was a derisive comment on their conduct rather than a description of their practices." Another source comments that "the reason for the choice of the term '*Hashishayah*' might have been to confer on the partisans of Hasan the low and disreputable character attributed by some scholars to hashish eaters rather than the actual devotion of Hasan's followers to the drug." It was a way to discredit them as well as hashish. In any event, the mention of the *Hashishiyah* reported in Arabic texts in 1125 indicates that the use of hashish was common enough at that time "so that it could appear in an official document and require no explanation whatever."<sup>4</sup>

"Thus the *nickname* ('*Hashishiyah*') and with it the extensive *use of hashish*, appear to have surfaced during the late eleventh century; both may have been promoted by the real or alleged use of cannabis by Hasan's devotees who were engaged in spreading a vast network of open and secret influence over the Muslim world, from Egypt to Iran and beyond."<sup>4</sup>

The other sect which used hashish during the 12th century, according to Arabic historians, was the Sufis, a mystical branch of Islam that first appeared at the end of the eighth century. The Arabs of Sufism ("wearers of wool") were dedicated to hours of fasting, prayer, and solitary meditation, stressed self-denial and shunned worldly pleasures. A story was told by al-Ukbari that cannabis was discovered by the religious leader Shaikh Haidar, a founder of the Haidari order of Sufis in Kharasan (northwest Iran and Afghanistan). Haidar lived in a monastery in the mountains of

Rama around A.D. 1200. While walking in the countryside in the midday heat, he discovered the divine properties of a plant that appeased hunger and thirst while giving joy. He told his disciples, "Almighty God has bestowed upon you by a special favor the virtues of this plant, which will dissipate the shadows that cloud your souls and will brighten your spirits." Haidar, like the Hindu priests 2,000 years before him, recommended that his followers conceal from the people the divine properties of this precious herb. But such secrets cannot be kept for centuries, and after his death his disciples extolled the wonderful qualities of the "magic" plant: "Abandon wine, take the cup of Haidar, this cup which has the fragrance of amber and sparkles like a green emerald." (Egyptian historian and Sufi-Critic, al-Maqrizi)<sup>7</sup>

While it is unlikely that Haidar discovered the mind-altering properties of cannabis, he might have developed a special recipe for consuming the plant. Even though the story of the old monk may be apocryphal, nonetheless, some of the Sufis did use hashish in their religious observances and spread its consumption throughout Islamic society,<sup>4</sup> introducing it to Syria and Egypt.<sup>8,9</sup> Most of the Sufis were recruited from among the poor, who could not afford wine, which, despite the Koranic ban, was abundantly used by the rich. Some Sufis claimed, as many Indian holy men had 20 centuries earlier, that the gentle herb expanded consciousness, brought insight, peace and repose, and closeness to God. Abel<sup>10</sup> has compared the Sufis with the hippies of modern America and Haidar with Timothy Leary, and Haidari monasteries with communes. Both groups, it is true, used the drug to proselytize and claimed that it would contribute to individual enlightenment and self-improvement. The analogy is misleading, however, because the hippies and Leary did not belong to any formal religious group, and, in addition to cannabis, used many other drugs such as LSD to produce a chemically induced alteration of consciousness. Sufism was and still is the mystical, contemplative branch of Islam. Most Sufis then and now practiced asceticism and a drug-free life to reach a true mystical experience. All the great Sufi mystics and saints such as al-Kalahabhi, al-Bistami, al-Ghazzali, and al-Islami rejected the use of the psychoactive drugs, which they considered a diabolic perversion. Today the order comprises thousands of deeply serious and devout men and women in nearly every Islamic country. Of all Moslems, they are probably the most aloof and inaccessible to Europeans. They practice a strict ascetic discipline to cleanse body and soul.<sup>11</sup>

The recorded histories of the *Hashishiyah* and of a deviant faction of

the Sufi sect clearly indicate an increase in cannabis use during the 12th century among religious sects located at the eastern periphery of the Arabic empire. During the same period that the Sufis introduced cannabis, along with opium, into Egypt at the end of the 12th century, alcohol production and sale was prohibited by the Ayubid King al-Afdal in Egypt and Syria. (Arab scientists had invented the alambic for the distillation of fermented beverages into alcohol.) But since there was no ban on cannabis cultivation or use, by the 13th century use of hashish had spread to the general population of the Islamic world and had gained converts in the West as well, from Egypt to Spain.

A 13th century Spanish botanist, Ibn Baitar, reporting on his trip to Egypt, describes the cultivation of "Konnab Indi" (*Cannabis indica*), which was called *hashish* by the local population. He noted that eating hashish, primarily by the Sufis for their religious devotions, produced intoxication, jocularity, and a dream-like state. He was the first scientist to remark that the drug also caused dementia.<sup>12</sup> He had little regard for the Sufis he met, referring to them as "men of the vilest class."

During the period that Ibn Baitar traveled through Egypt, the Mongols entered Persia in their westward attempt to overrun the Arab empire. For more than a century they spread terror and dislocation in the invaded areas. Baghdad was sacked in 1258. These fierce warriors were familiar with both cannabis and alcohol.<sup>13,14</sup> In fact, some Arab historians (Ibn Taymiyah and al-Zarkoshi) blame the spread of hashish in the 13th century on the Mongol invasions.<sup>4</sup> There is little evidence for such a contention, however, since the consumption of cannabis preceeded the Mongol invasions by many years. Still, by driving eastern refugees, many of them Sufis, to the urban areas of Egypt and Syria, the Mongols may in that way have contributed to the westward spread of hashish.<sup>4</sup>

In the middle of the 13th century, the Mameluks overthrew the Ayyubid dynasty in Syria and Egypt, thereby inaugurating a lengthy period of economic, social, and cultural decadence which coincided with widespread use of hashish among the common people. This somber period of Egyptian history (1250-1571) was followed by the ruthless domination of the Ottoman Empire, which lasted until 1804.

For centuries a privileged and dissolute Circassian or Turkish ruling class, alien to Egypt, exploited the indigenous agrarian laborers. Hashish consumption was common to oppressor and oppressed alike. The rulers took it to enhance their pleasure<sup>15</sup> and the peasants to escape the dreariness of their daily lives.

Unfavorable social consequences probably accompanied the hashish habit, because early social reformers, some sultans and emirs of Persia, Turkey, and Egypt, tried repeatedly to reverse the trend toward cannabis abuse among their people.

#### THE SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF HASHISH USAGE IN ISLAM: POINT AND COUNTERPOINT

As the popularity of hashish increased, its widespread use was perceived as a threat to society by responsible political leaders. There had been little reaction from the authorities, Ayyubid or Mamluk, so long as hashish use was limited to some deviant Sufis, who represented only a small, unproductive fraction of the population. The rulers became alarmed when the drug began to affect all levels of society, including professionals and merchants, and they periodically attempted to curtail or to suppress its use not so much for moral or religious reasons as to protect the state. While they were able temporarily to decrease hashish consumption, they were never able to suppress it altogether despite their absolute political and religious power.

In Egypt the first measures aimed at curtailing hashish use were taken by the governor of Cairo during the last years of the Ayyubid dynasty. He ordered the destruction of all of the cannabis plants growing in the Kafur park, a favorite gathering place for drifters and other amateurs of hashish (as a poet of the time wrote, "The green plant which grows in the Garden of Kafur replaces in our hearts the effects of wine, old and generous"). A police detail uprooted and burned all the plants in huge bonfires, as they do today in northern California. But this isolated effort to curtail cultivation of hashish was short-lived, and cannabis plants, grown by local farmers eager to increase their incomes, reappeared on the outskirts of Cairo.

The founder of the Mameluk dynasty in Egypt, King al-Zahir Babar (1266-1275), who had defeated the Mongol invaders at Goliath's Well in Syria, made the next attempt to ban the use of cannabis. A devout Moslem, Babar might have had religious objections to hashish use. But, because of his campaigns against the Mongols, the drug's debilitating effect on his soldiers' mental and physical capacities concerned him most.<sup>3</sup> Whereas his Ayyubid dynasty predecessors had only attempted to discourage hashish cultivation, in 1266 Babar embarked on a total ban of both cultivation and consumption. He did the same with wine. Fields

where the plant was cultivated were put to the torch, all taverns and brothels were closed, the sale of hashish and wine was outlawed, and all hashish users were penalized. A judge praised his efforts, "The devil has no desire to stay with us! You have prevented him from obtaining both wine and hashish. You have thus deprived him of his water and fodder."<sup>4</sup>

Babar's successor, al-Mansur Galawan, reversed this repressive policy against drugs and tried a liberal approach. He imposed an excise tax on the sale of hashish and wine. Although his new policy generated revenues, it also resulted in an increased alcohol and hashish consumption to such a degree that this liberal reformer was forced to reimpose prohibition to protect his society's future.<sup>3</sup>

In the Islamic world of the 14th century, the use of hashish became even more prevalent and spread along the East Coast of Africa and west to North Africa and Spain. The botanist Ibn Batuta, in his travels from Persia to East Africa (1348), reported that hashish was eaten by the people, sometimes even in the mosques. He also mentioned the use of alcohol among the Muslim upper classes.<sup>13</sup> In Morocco hashish was called *kaif* (known as "kif" today) and was used in the religious ceremonies of the Sunusis sect.<sup>3</sup> The drug was also openly consumed in Southern Spain until that country's reconquest by Isabella the Catholic and the re-establishment of the firm grip of the Roman Catholic Church.

Alarmed by the widespread use of the drug, the authorities periodically attempted to curtail its usage. At the turn of the 14th century, the Ayyubid Sultan Nizam-Ud-Din of Syria ordered cannabis plants uprooted and burned, and condemned hashish eaters to having their teeth extracted. But 25 years later hashish was again commonly used and discussed in public.<sup>8</sup> In Egypt there were three renewed attempts to ban the drug: In 1324 the governor of Cairo confiscated and destroyed supplies of hashish and wine. Fifty years later (1376), according to al-Maqrizi,<sup>7</sup> the amir Sudun Shaik-kuni issued the same orders as Ayyubid sultan Nizam. Once more, at the end of the century (1394), Egyptian authorities in Cairo decreed a ban on hashish use and a destruction of the plants. Although these vigorous attempts at curtailing or suppressing cannabis consumption were short-lived, they do indicate that the rulers felt its widespread use was damaging society. As Rosenthal states:<sup>4</sup>

Islamic society did not have to fear the potential harm that hashish was able by prolonged use to inflict upon individual users. Its most important problem, which called for action, was the cumulative effect produced by large numbers of addicts. The periods when secular authorities tried openly and energetically to

fight drug use were sporadic. They were not the result of a revival of religious fervor where doctrinal considerations determined the government's attitude. They reflected an acute fear that a potential social evil threatening the welfare of the state might eventually get out of hand.

Not all rulers were concerned. For instance, when the sultan of Bagdad retired with his retinue to Cairo in 1393 he used hashish publicly, creating severe criticism in Egyptian ruling circles. Their attitude and repeated attempts to ban cannabis cultivation indicate that, unlike their counterparts in Bagdad, Egyptian leaders did not accept the drug even though its use was prevalent among the people.

There were no other concerted government attempts at banning the drug after the 14th century. Not until the 19th century were repressive measures again tried. Hashish was widely used in the interval. Under the Mameluk rule, which was marked by factionalism, revolts, and repression, the historian al-Maqrizi took a dim view of hashish consumption which "is now eaten openly and discussed candidly in the streets of Cairo, especially among the poor who claim the drug helps them escape their miserable condition."<sup>6</sup>

In the early part of the 16th century the Mameluks were defeated by the Ottomans, and Syria and Egypt came under a new foreign rule. During the reign of Sulaiman the Great (1520-1566), the high point of the Ottoman empire, the historian al-Tunis (1550) noted that in Egypt the common people, following the lead of the wealthy class, sought intoxication by ingesting cannabis extracts. From then on, cannabis was considered to be "the grass of the poor" (*hashichat-oul-fouquar'a*). When European traders introduced tobacco smoking to the Ottoman empire (circa 1600), a habit the Turks believed immoral, harsh penalties were imposed to suppress it. As elsewhere in the world, the new habit caught on quickly. Tobacco was often smoked with hashish in a water pipe (*narguileh*), an Oriental invention. The old custom of ingesting hashish preparations continued unabated, especially among the poorer classes.

In his 16th century monograph, *De medicina Aegyptiorum*, Prosper Alpinus described hashish intoxication in Egypt. "For an hour afterwards, those who have taken it, display their madness, and remaining for a long time in a state of ecstasy, revel in their delightful dreams. This drug is a favorite for the common people because it is bought at a reasonable price."<sup>16</sup>

Cannabis use was not as prevalent in Turkey as in the Arabian provinces of the Ottoman empire, Syria, and Egypt. The ruling classes



adopted the habits of the conquered Greek and Armenian minorities, and used alcohol and wine preferentially, while the less fortunate had to be content with hashish. A 17th century historian, Eulogio Efendi, reports that in Constantinople there were more than 1,000 beer shops and 104 wine distributors but only 60 places where hashish was sold and smoked.

In the last part of the 17th century a French traveler, C. Sonnini, reported in his book *Travels in Egypt* (1790), the widespread consumption by the Arabs of potions made from hemp plants.

The Arabs are thrown into a sort of pleasing inebriety, a state of 'reverie' that inspires gaiety and at times agreeable dreams. This kind of annihilation of the faculty of thinking, this kind of slumber of the soul, bears no resemblance to the intoxication produced by wine or strong liquors, and the French language affords no terms by which it can be expressed. The Arabs give the name of *kif* to this voluptuous vacuity of mind, this sort of fascinating stupor.<sup>17</sup>

#### KIF IN THE OLD KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

After Egypt, Morocco is the North African country with the longest documented record of cannabis use. The drug is known there under the name of *kif*, which in Arabic means pleasure or well being and connotes dream and ecstasy.

The Spanish botanist, Ibn Baitar, who travelled through North Africa in the first part of the 13th century, reported that the use and cultivation of cannabis which was prevalent in Egypt was not seen in the rest of North Africa. The intoxicant was probably introduced into Morocco toward the end of the 13th century and spread from there to the Iberian Peninsula. At that time the power of the Cherifian kingdom of Morocco had reached its highest point. It had been founded five centuries before in 783 when Arab invaders reached the western tip of North Africa. The conquerors settled in the fertile coastal plains while the indigenous Berbers retired to the mountains of the Rif in the north and to the Atlas in the south, but only after having been converted to the Islamic faith.

The two populations which shared the same religion have kept until this day distinctive cultural, linguistic, and ethnic features. The successive dynasties of Moroccan kings dotted the country with three magnificent capitals: Rabat, Fez, and Marrakech, the latter founded in the 11th century in an oasis at the foot of high Atlas mountains, gave its name to the kingdom. In all three cities great mosques and palaces beautifully decorated testify to the achievements of a most civilized people.

The emergence of the use of *kif* in Morocco late in the 13th century

coincided with the start of a long period of quiescence which was also observed throughout the Moslem world until the modern era. The cannabis habit was adopted as elsewhere in Arab-dominated lands, creating the same controversies which we have previously described between the unswerving adepts of the weed and its determined detractors.

We have few records of this period during which Morocco, a self-sufficient nation, was cut off from the outside world and lived according to feudal, ancestral rules in a theocracy headed by a descendent of the prophet. The mariner and explorer, Thomas Pellow,<sup>18</sup> reported that a ruler of Morocco, Muley Ali, lost his throne in 1736 as a result of his known addiction to hashish. Pellow also stated that cannabis was the next main crop after cereals. However, more recent reports indicate that cultivation of the plant was not widespread throughout the kingdom but limited to certain areas in the north, near the capital of Fez, in the provinces of Hoha and Shedma. Communication was very poor in this rugged land, and each valley had to remain self-sufficient.<sup>19</sup>

#### MEDICAL USE OF CANNABIS

During all these centuries cannabis continued to be used for medical purposes. Moslem physicians found more medicinal uses for cannabis than had been reported in the texts of Galen and Dioscorides. The physician al-Razi (865-925) refers to using hemp leaves as a medicament for the ear, and prescribes them for dandruff and for dissolving flatulence. He also describes their curative power in cases of epilepsy. Rumphius, a German botanist (A.D. 1100), describes in his herbarium the Moslem use of cannabis to treat asthma, gonorrhea, constipation, and as an antidote for poisoning. Other Arab physicians reported that hashish was used to stimulate the appetite (al-Badri, 1251) and produced a craving for sweets; others described it as "a beautiful music to the sense of hearing". Although it "opened the gates of desire",<sup>20</sup> prolonged use was believed to cut off the desire for sexual intercourse. A 17th century pharmacopeia of al-Intaqui prescribes cannabis for a large variety of somatic ailments and also mentions the euphoria and lethargy produced by the drug.

#### USE OF CANNABIS IN MOSLEM SOCIETY

Even though consumption of cannabis permeated Moslem society, the exact patterns of use are difficult to determine accurately. According to Rosenthal,<sup>4</sup> "A certain class distinction was made between confirmed

addicts and the rest of the people. Hashish eaters were believed to be poor and low class people led by their habit to beggary (*harfasha*).'' Use of the drug ''generates low social rank (*safalah*) and a bad moral character (*radhalah*)'' and ''negates the existence of a well ordered society''. The evidence available indicates that the great consumers of hashish were the poor, uneducated peasants, and city laborers, as well as some learned Sufis and writers. Both groups intermingled, sharing their contempt for an establishment riddled with corruption. For them hashish was cheap and easily available even in the corner of every mosque. ''An ounce of hashish is more effective than pints of wine,'' claimed a poet. Since drinking wine was forbidden by the Prophet, use of a drug not mentioned by him and that was, besides, easy to conceal seemed less contemptible.

If the use of hashish appears to have carried a measure of social disapproval by the ruling class of sultans and caliphs, very little is known about the prevalence of hashish intoxication among their retinue and the lesser members of the establishment: civil servants and the military, the middle class, merchants, and craftsmen. Hashish was certainly used by many of them, although less blatantly than by the poor. Available texts indicate, however, that the moneyed classes preferred wine and alcohol to cannabis. As early as 1325 Ibn Batuta observed that alcohol use was a serious problem in the upper classes of Islam, who, despite the religious taboo, enjoyed wine. Most poets glorified the virtues of wine rather than those of hashish. ''Hashish poetry is little when compared to the abundance of verses on wine that were composed at all times'' writes Rosenthal.<sup>4</sup>

#### HASHISH AND THE ISLAMIC INTELLIGENTSIA

The extensive spread of cannabis use in Islam between the 13th and 16th centuries was accompanied by a spirited controversy among the intelligentsia that dwarfs the debate among American intellectuals of the last part of the 20th century. Moslem jurists, historians, theologians, poets, and storytellers discussed for centuries the merits and evils of the herb.

The controversy had its source in the fact that the holy Koran, the foundation of Moslem jurisprudence, does not mention hashish, while it does specifically forbid the use of *Khamr*, which has been interpreted as meaning wine as well as intoxicants.

O you who believe, Khamr, and gambling, dedication of stones and divination by arrows are an abomination of Satan. Therefore avoid them that you may prosper" (Sura Five verse 90)

"Satan's plan is to excite enmity and hatred among you with khamr and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of God and his prayer will you not then abstain? (Sura Five verse 91)

The Koran also states: "Approach not prayers with a mind befogged not until you can understand all that you say." (Sura Five verse 44) Since Muslims must pray at regular intervals five times a day, the prohibition of praying while under the influence of intoxicants limits their use considerably.

At the time of the Prophet, *khamr* referred to wine, but during the three centuries which followed Mahomet's death Muslim legal scholars interpreted *khamr* as meaning any intoxicant that befogs the mind. "It is true that the word *khamr* is derived from the verb *khamara* which means to cover, or conceal and conveys the meaning of a substance which covers up the mind."<sup>21</sup> The legal scholars' interpretation, however, did not correspond to popular usage, which still equated *khamr* with wine only. For many Muslims the ban against fermented beverages did not necessarily apply to hashish. Despite this disagreement, three of the four schools of Islamic law, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali, classified hashish as an intoxicant and finally outlawed its use by any true Sunni Muslim believer.

The fourth major legal school, however, the Hanafi, used the narrower definition of intoxicant. Hashish could be consumed in small quantities or for medical reasons. As stated by az-Zarkashi in 1360, "Any use of wine is forbidden because it is unclean, unlike hashish which is permitted but not for intoxication." Another jurist of Agfashi claimed in 1390 that, "Contrary to wine, hashish is used as medicine. It is not subject to punishment, and eating a small quantity of it is not forbidden as long as it does not influence the mind or senses."

The many pharmacological properties of cannabis and its prescription by Arab physicians for a large number of ailments influenced the Muslim jurists in their attitude toward the drug. If they were dealing with a useful medicine how could they pronounce a total ban of this substance like the one formulated by the Prophet against wine?

A respected Shafute legal scholar, Az-Zakarshi (1344-1392),<sup>22</sup> remarked that the use of hashish could be considered lawful if it were consumed "for medical necessity to produce anesthesia for an amputation, and if consumed to still hunger," and the scholar added "if the user is immune to the intoxicating effect of hashish."

Possible physically and mentally harmful effects worried legal scholars because Moslem law does not permit self-destruction of the mind or body. But the argument that hashish permanently corrupted the mind and body could not be objectively proved.

The opinion of the Shak-al-Harin, expressed as early as the 13th century, prevailed: "All the destructive effects of wine are found in hashish many times over." The jurists were able to declare, "All orthodox Muslem religious authorities agree that a condition of stupor or exhilaration due to consumption of any substance which affects the mind is prohibited by Islam."<sup>20</sup>

Even though the jurists were finally successful in arguing for the illegality of cannabis, they proved unsuccessful in devising effective ways to curtail its use. Their victory was a Pyrrhic one, and they had to be resigned to letting their people continue a habit over which religious law had no control because the problem had been debated too long and ignored by too many. The belief that the Prophet really had banned only alcohol became ingrained among the people.

#### HASHISH AND POETRY

Many writers and poets of the time extolled the marvelous properties of *bhāṅg* and hashish and defended their use. One example is the 11th century *Tales of the Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>23</sup> The author of the flying carpet might have himself experienced the feeling of levitation and flying resulting from cannabis intoxication. Other tales such as that of the "hashish eater" in the *hammam* (public bath) describe the more deceptive aspects of the drug which give rise to confusion of personal desire with hard reality. In another tale a religious leader, while exhorting the faithful at the mosque against the evil substance, drops some of his *bhāṅg* on the floor. He warns his listeners to keep away from the drug, only to recover it after they have left.<sup>16</sup>

The most vocal defender of hashish was al-Ukbari (1275) who, in "Thoughts in praise of the qualities of cannabis," wrote, "Know that the holy law has not indicated that the use of drugs that cause joy such as saffron or others similar to hashish is forbidden. No indication has come down from the Prophet that it is forbidden as such and no punishment has been established for eating it."<sup>24</sup>

Two hundred years after al-Ukbari, al-Badri does not condemn the drug in his long treatise on hashish.<sup>25</sup> He mentions the low status of the hashish user "who gets to be hated by mankind," and has to swallow his drug and

keep silent. He also describes the close ties among users who may "share hashish with a goodly young man."

Although jurists had compared hashish and wine, their scholarly tests did not arouse much interest among the people. It was the Arab poets who caught popular fancy in their rhymes contrasting the "green one" (hashish) and the "red one" (wine).

One Syrian poet, al-Is-Irdi, who lived in the middle of the 13th century, summarized the respective merits of wine and hashish:

The secret of hashish lifts up the spirit  
In an ascent of disembodied thinking.  
It is pure spirit. Free are its confines  
From worries. Only the elect may taste it.  
Hashish involves no sin. You are not punished.  
Their wine makes you forget all meanings. Our herb  
Recalls the mysteries of godly beauty.  
You can obtain the green stuff without haggling.  
You do not need much gold and silver for it.  
Tucked in a handkerchief it can be carried.  
No cup is needed if you wish to use it.  
You find yourself clean, virtuous and witty.  
Bright too and free from all annoying dullness.  
The body is not tired eliminating  
And vomiting like an inflated wine skin.  
In times both good and bad you may enjoy it.  
It is no hindrance to nights of devotion.

After extolling the virtues of hashish, the same poet praises the qualities of wine as compared to the herb:

Would you by eating grass that is not juicy  
Want to be like a dumb beast without reason?  
Their herb brings shame upon a decent person  
So that he slinks about just like a killer  
Our wine brings honor to the lowly person  
And dignity so none is his master  
Unlike hashish, its qualities are useful  
Speak out! Count and describe wine's many meanings!  
No caliph surely ever tasted hashish.  
Nor did a king in full command and power.  
Whatever else but wine can tinge the hands that  
Holding up a cup of wine reflect its color  
When wine appears, the drinker's secret gets out  
And gladdens him, his rosy cheek wine colored  
Drink wine! Don't listen to censorious people  
Though wine may be outlawed in our religion!<sup>4</sup>

The poet remains objective: Hashish is cheap, is not a sin; it confers to the user exalted spiritual experiences, while wine although illegal, is compatible with worldly power and decisive action. The hashish user belongs to the dregs of society. In subsequent verses the poet extolls the erotic power of both drugs. For wine: "Drunk, the beloved turns and bends down swaying Gracefully like the bent branch of a willow ...." For hashish: "Its virtues are all there when eating Hashish with a gazelle slender like a willow ...."

In another poem by the Syrian Ibn al-A'-ma (1292), hashish is judged infinitely superior to wine, which is unclean, used in the sacrilegious Christian rites, and illegal,

Give up wine and drink from the wine of Haydar . . . .  
It is virginal, not deflowered by rain,  
Nor has it ever been squeezed by feet or hands.  
No Christian priest has ever played around with the  
cup containing it,  
Nor have they ever given communion from its cask to any  
heretic's soul. Nothing has been said expressly by Malik to declare  
it unlawful,  
Nor is the *had* penalty for its use found prescribed.<sup>4</sup>

In later centuries poets continued to exalt the alleged virtues of hashish; ignoring the legal debate, they described the unique qualities of a drug which confers joy, repose, relief from worries, opens new vistas to the inquiring mind, broadens understanding, stimulates conviviality and fellowship, and enhances perception of music. These were features that also attracted the intelligentsia of the upper class to indulge in hashish use.

### THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF HASHISH

Disadvantages to use of the drug were reported. Scholars and physicians described the drug's mental and physical symptoms:

al-Zakarshi noted reddening of the eye, dryness of mouth, excessive sleeping and heaviness in the head when the drug takes possession of the brain, as well as numbness of the extremities. Prolonged use dries up the semen [already noted by Galen] and cuts off the desire for sexual intercourse, cuts short the reproductive capacity; brings forth hidden disease, harms the intestine, makes the limb inactive, causes a shortage of breath, diminishes vision in the eye and increases pensiveness in the imagination after initially causing joy; hashish produces narcosis, laziness, stupor, weakening sense perception, foul breath, and ruination of color and complexion. Hashish is mind changing and personality changing, causing insanity in the habitual user; changes the mind making it absent from reality.<sup>22</sup>

Addiction was also observed: "Among the greatest physical harm caused by it is the fact that habitual users of it are hardly ever able to repent of it because of the effect it has upon their temper" says al-Zakarshi,<sup>20</sup> and al-Badri concurs:<sup>22</sup> "The user cannot separate from it and leave it alone." In addition, the drug's adversaries continued to remark that hashish saps the user's energy, ability, and willingness to work. Implicitly, this was considered its greatest danger to the social fabric.

#### A CONCLUSION FOR OUR TIME

The medieval Arab world was one of the centers of civilization. In such fabulous cities as Persepolis, Bagdad, and Damascus an industrious population of traders and craftsmen thrived. They built elegant mosques and palaces, and financed famous universities where the best mathematicians, scientists, and scholars of the time could be found. Did hashish contribute to the fragmentation and decline of the brilliant Moslem empire as hinted by some historians?<sup>13,14</sup> Such a decline cannot be attributed to any single cause but to many interacting factors that tend to erode man's creative energy and blunt the full exercise of his power. Among these, abuse of *cannabis*, the deceptive weed, with its promise of instant heaven on earth, cannot be excluded. Its widespread consumption may have oriented many citizens toward the self-centered, dreamy existence that was extolled by some of the intelligentsia but decried by many jurists and warriors.

When the Semitic tribes of the Arabic peninsula, moved by their Islamic faith, first conquered an empire greater than the Roman, cannabis was unknown. Gradually, however, cannabis began to permeate all levels of Moslem society and distracted many from the Prophet's long-term goal of establishing through conquest the true faith of Islam everywhere. This historical perspective has led Moslem leaders of today to side with orthodox Moslem scholars and attempt to curtail hashish use among their people.

Although many commercial and cultural contacts occurred after the 13th century, as a result of the Crusades, between the Arab world and the European nations lining the Mediterranean Sea, the use of cannabis as a pleasure-seeking, mind-altering drug did not spread to western Europe until the second part of the 20th century. Early Venetian traders and explorers brought back spices and incense, but not cannabis, from Turkish-dominated ports. This still held true when the major European powers



of the 17th and 18th centuries—France, Holland, and England—entered the colonial era and exerted direct control over large portions of Eastern, Middle Eastern, and African countries where cannabis intoxication was prevalent. There seemed to have been a cultural cleavage that kept the Europeans from adopting this Oriental habit. Representatives of the colonial powers continued to use their traditional pleasure-inducing substances. The British imported with them whiskey and sherry. The French brought along wine or planted vineyards, as they did in Algeria after the 1831 conquest.

The picture had changed completely by the middle of the 20th century following World War II. And today the similarity of the views and arguments of medieval Islam and the 20th century United States is striking. The debate on the pros and cons of marihuana and alcohol is every bit as heated<sup>26,27</sup>. The same sort of claim (now amplified by the media) about the redeeming and beneficial effects of cannabis and the same strong statements about its harmful ones are heard. Little has changed except for one factor: today science has the ability to measure more objectively the properties and effects of the drug on the human mind and body. One question remains unanswered: Will this knowledge help Western man to preserve himself against his deep-seated desire for instant pleasure-reward and society against the damaging effect of cannabis abuse?<sup>28</sup>

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### ERRATA

In the October issue of the *Bulletin* (Volume 58, No. 7), page 641, the caption for the figure is as follows: Etchings of major characters in Shakespeare's plays by the artist John Hutton on the windows of the Nuffield Shakespeare Library in Stratford-on-Avon. Reading left to right, first row: Falstaff and Richard III, Bottom and Queen Titania, Cordelia and Lear. Second row: Portia and Shylock, Othello and Desdemona, Julius Caesar and Romeo and Juliet. Third row: Lord and Lady Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, and Ophelia and Hamlet.

The first line on page 641 has a misspelling of "Shakespearean." On page 643, nine lines from the bottom, there should be a comma after Bianca. On the same page, fourth line from the bottom, "his" should be "my" (Crowns in my purse).

On page 646, 11th line, the word "his" should precede "wife." On page 651, line 6, "seized" should be "seize."